Impact of Educating Children Together – Phase 3 (ECT3) in Mozambique

Authors: Feliciano Chimbutane, Carlos Lauchande, Catalina Herrera Almanza, Naureen Karachiwalla, Jessica Leight, and Sarim Zafar, on behalf of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)

Abstract

Investing in human capital during the early years carries significant consequences for long-term resilience and poverty outcomes. Enhanced nutrition and increased educational attainment not only bolster access to work but also increase productivity, consequently influencing incomes.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), through the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program, funds school feeding and related education and nutrition activities in Mozambique and other countries. World Vision implements the Educating Children Together III (ECT III) project in Mozambique with support from this program. ECT3 is an integrated program through which World Vision (WV) supplies enriched corn-soy blend (CSB) flour for daily school meals to students, teachers, and administrative staff as the main activity. Within this program, WV also implements the Unlock Literacy model to improve the quality of literacy instruction. The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) a subrecipient under the ECT3 award, conducted an impact evaluation of the program, which has two stages: baseline (2021) and endline (2023). Teachers reported that they found the training useful, that reading camps were helpful for their students, and that the school meals helped with student attendance and attentiveness.

Background

In Mozambique, deficits in both health and education are large and persistent: Notably, the prevalence of anemia among children aged 0–5 in rural areas reached 49.5% in 2018 (SETSAN, 2018). Early childhood stunting (Mendez and Adair, 1999) and anaemia (Soemantri et al., 1985) are associated with poor performance on tests and cognitive assessments. In response, many governments and NGOs have established school feeding programs with the intent of improving school performance through reduced undernutrition.

World Vision has implemented phase three of the Educating Children Together (ECT3) project, funded by the USDA McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program, in Nacarôa and Muecate districts of the Nampula Province. The program has two strategic objectives: 1) Improved literacy of school-age children. 2) Increased use of health and dietary practices.

Methodology

ELIM Serviços, working under the supervision of IFPRI as the subcontractor, conducted the baseline survey for this impact evaluation between June and August 2021. The endline survey was conducted in July and August 2023 by Austral Consultoria Lda, also working under the supervision of IFPRI, in the 160 target schools in Nacarôa and Muecate districts, Nampula province.

The evaluation of ECT3 used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, with both types of data collected at baseline and endline. Quantitative interviews were conducted with school directors (or their deputies), the grade 3 teachers, the school cooks, the reading camp leaders in the community, and students. Students were also administered the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) to measure their reading abilities.

This evaluation was a randomized control trial designed to analyze the effects of Unlock Literacy

teacher programming and community action, implemented in conjunction with school meals, in a sample of 160 rural, public, primary schools in two districts (Nacarôa and Muecate) in Nampula province.

Key Findings

School meals. All participants interviewed agreed that school meals contributed to improved nutrition and school attendance and retention among the students in the program. The opportunity to have a meal at school was one of the main motivations of students to attend school. In fact, monitoring data indicate that students enrolment in primary school has increased to 95,634 (113%) against the 84,840 target.

Reading camps. Different categories of participants agreed that the reading camps incorporated the most impactful activities carried out within the community engagement component of the ECT3 program. The fact that students who reported having books to read at school scored 1.46 points higher in EGRA (10% of Standard Deviation) than those who did not have access to books at school, not only reinforces the importance of providing access to books, including through reading camps, particularly in contexts where students do not have access to these materials in their homes.

Promotion of School Attendance. The influence of parents and guardians in encouraging their children to attend school significantly affects student achievement. In fact, those students whose parents seldom communicated with teachers scored 0.51 points lower, equivalent to 7.5% of the standard deviation, compared to those whose parents were more actively involved in teacher communication.

Recommendations

Increase Teacher Training Participation: More regular and repeat training, and possibly compensating teachers for travel costs.

Improve Reading Camp Attendance: Devise new strategies to incentivize regular attendance and consider compensating reading camp leaders.

Post-Training Assessments: Implement assessments and classroom observations to ensure teachers retain and apply training.

Integrate with National Programs: Consider integrating program schools into the national school feeding program (PRONAE).

Conclusion

Having books at home (an important part of the home environment) is the largest determinant of reading fluency. The second largest driving factor in EGRA scores is student participation in reading camps, indicating that this element of the program was especially effective in improving student learning. The school meals were extremely positively viewed, and all recipients wanted the program to continue.

However, all types of participants raised concerns about sustainability. There were also concerns regarding compensation of teachers to attend training and for cooks and reading camp leaders who are volunteers not being sufficiently compensated for their time.

References

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